IN THE CLAIMS

PLEASE AMEND THE CLAIMS AS FOLLOWS:

1. (currently amended) A network appliance, comprising:

   at least one platform service;

   ~~a load balancing process that performs load balancing on communications received by the network appliance; and~~

   a service ~~monitoring process~~ monitor that monitors a working status of the at least one platform service using interprocess communications; and

   a load balancer that performs load balancing on received communications based on at least the working status of the at least one platform service.

2. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 1, further comprising a backplane interface through which the network appliance exchanges data with another device.

3. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 2, wherein

   the another device hosts at least one second platform service, and

   the service ~~monitoring process~~ monitor monitors a working status of the at least one second platform service using communications transmitted over the backplane.

4. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 1, further comprising an interface ~~monitoring process~~ monitor that monitors a working status of interfaces and connections employed by the network appliance.

5. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 1, wherein the at least one platform service is an access method service.

3

6. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 5, wherein the access method service is a virtual private network service.

7. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim ~~1~~ 5, wherein the access method service is an extranet Web service.

8. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 1, further comprising a node manager ~~process~~ that ~~monitors~~ determines ~~an operational~~ the working status of the at least one platform service and provides [[a]] the determined ~~operational~~ working status of the at least one platform service to the service ~~monitoring process~~ monitor.

9. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim 1, further comprising a distributed cache service that caches information relating to ~~the~~ at least one platform service on another network appliance.

10. (currently amended) The network appliance ~~recited in~~ of claim ~~1~~ 9, wherein
    the at least one platform service is an access method service; and
    the cached information includes authentication information and encryption key information for encryption sessions hosted by the access method service.

4

11. (currently amended) A network comprising

a first network appliance having at least one first platform service, ~~a first load balancing process that performs load balancing on communications received by the first network appliance, and~~ a service ~~monitoring process~~ <u>monitor</u> that monitors a <u>working</u> status of the at least one first platform service using interprocess communications<u>, and a first load balancer that performs load balancing on communications received by the first network appliance based on at least the working status of the at least one first platform service</u>; and

a second network appliance having at least one second platform service and a second load ~~balancing process~~ <u>balancer</u> that performs load balancing on communications received by the second network appliance.

12. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ <u>of</u> claim 11, wherein the second network appliance further includes a second service ~~monitoring process~~ <u>monitor</u> that monitors a <u>working</u> status of the at least one second platform service using interprocess communications.

13. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ <u>of</u> claim 11, wherein

the first network appliance is configured to receive all client communications to the network unless the first load ~~balancing process~~ <u>balancer</u> fails; and

the second network appliance is configured to receive all client communications to the network if the first load ~~balancing process~~ <u>balancer</u> fails.

14. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ <u>of</u> claim 11, wherein the at least one first platform service is an access method service.

15. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ <u>of</u> claim 14, wherein the access method service is a virtual private network service.

16. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ of claim 14, wherein the access method service is an extranet Web service.

17. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ of claim 11, wherein the at least one second platform service is an access method service.

18. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ of claim 17, wherein the access method service is a virtual private network service.

19. (currently amended) The network ~~recited in~~ of claim 17, wherein the access method service is an extranet Web service.

20. (currently amended) A method of processing client communications to a network comprising:

    receiving a first client communication at a first network appliance hosting at least one first platform service;

    employing a load ~~balancing service~~ balancer hosted by the first network appliance to direct the first client communication to [[a]] the at least one first platform service ~~also~~ hosted by the first network appliance based on at least a working status of the at least one first platform service;

    receiving a second client communication at the first network appliance; and

    employing the load ~~balancing service~~ balancer to direct the second client communication to a second platform service ~~also~~ hosted by a second network appliance based on at least the working status of the at least one first platform service and a working status of the second platform service.

21. (currently amended) The method ~~recited in~~ of claim 20, further comprising:

    analyzing the first client communication to determine if the first client

        communication includes association data indicating that the first client

        communication is associated with the <u>at least one</u> first platform service; and

    determining that the first client communication includes association data

        indicating that the first communication is associated with the<u> at least one</u>

        first platform service.

22. (currently amended) The method ~~recited in~~ of claim 21, wherein the association data is a session identifier identifying an encryption session maintained by the<u> at least one</u> first platform service.

23. (currently amended) The method ~~recited in~~ of claim 20, further comprising

    executing a load balancing algorithm to determine whether the second client

        communication should be directed to the second platform service; and

    determining that the second client communication should be directed to the

        second platform service based upon results of the executed load balancing

        algorithm.

24. (cancelled)

25. (cancelled)